

## Geographic Review Panel 3 – American River/Eastside Tribes

**Proposal number:** 2001-H209

**Short Proposal Title:** Digital Soil Survey  
Mapping and Imagery

**1. Applicability to CALFED ERP Goals and Implementation Plan and CVPIA priorities, and relevance to ERP and CVPIA priorities for your region.** The project applicant proposes to make soils information more accessible to individuals and groups engaged in ecosystem restoration projects in the Bay-Delta region and, in doing so, to improve and enhance the efforts to re-establish and support sustainable ecosystems and associated biological communities. As such, the proposed work will indirectly benefit CVPIA priorities, particularly (a) and (f) and potentially all six of the CALFED restoration goals.

**2. Linkages/coordination with previously funded projects or other restoration activities in your region.** This project relates to potentially all past, present and future restoration projects. CALFED intends that watershed-level planning be science-based, using the most accurate information available. Soils data are an important and under utilized tool that can be used to analyze conditions in an ecosystem or watershed context, and to develop and evaluate restoration alternatives. The issue is not the importance of soils, but the increased utility of digital over paper maps.

**3. Feasibility, especially the project's ability to move forward in a timely and successful manner.** The proposed work is technically feasible.

**4. Qualifications of the applicants and others involved in implementing the proposed project.** Highly qualified. Although the project principals and their backgrounds are not specified, NRCS staff and their partners have successfully completed similar projects (see examples of digitized soil data at <http://www.ftw.nrcs.usda.gov/ssur-data.html>).

**5. Local involvement (including environmental compliance).** Local involvement is broad and well defined.

Environmental compliance is not applicable.

**6. Cost.** This project is far too expensive, because it would digitize soil maps by whole counties, rather than restricting itself to areas that plausibly might be considered for restoration. With the exception of those surveys out of print, soil survey data and maps are generally available, albeit in a more cumbersome and less accessible format than that proposed by the project applicant. A more cost-effective approach would be to prioritize the proposed work by general availability of existing surveys or by acreage of funded restoration projects (e.g. out of print areas first; acres of funded riparian re-vegetation, et cetera).

**7. Cost sharing.** Yes. \$287,901 contributed by NRCS.

**8. Additional comments.** This proposal actually does a good job of stating a testable hypothesis: that digitized soil maps will be used more in designing restoration projects than paper soil maps, but it does nothing to test this hypothesis. Rather, it simply asserts that "As a result, these projects will be more responsive to establishing habit and supporting sustainable populations of valuable species."

An acceptable project would identify areas that have some prospect for restoration and randomly select half for digitizing, following some scheme stratified by soil type and perhaps other factors. Then, by some previously defined protocol, it would compare the way that restoration proposals in the different areas use soil information.

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## **Regional Ranking**

**Panel Ranking:** Low

**Provide a brief explanation of your ranking:** Although soils are a critical and often neglected factor in restoration projects, this project is simply about presenting the information in another format, and it is not all clear that this would help. The benefit is simply assumed, and nothing is proposed to test whether it would actually occur. This is emphatically NOT adaptive management. It seems possible to design a study that could test whether it would help, but such a proposal would look very different from the one in hand.

The proposal seems to fall within the NRCS mission, so outside funding seems unjustified, especially because most of the area to which the proposal applies will not be considered for restoration.